

Guide for Participation
In California
Statewide Alternate Assessment

California Department of Education
Special Education Division

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PREFACE

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) require that all States produce guidelines for the alternate assessment of children with disabilities who cannot take part in general statewide and district-wide assessment programs. States must implement an alternate assessment system no later than July 1, 2000.

The purpose of this document is to describe how students with severe disabilities are to participate in California's statewide assessment program. These statewide guidelines may also serve as a model to school districts as they develop local guidelines for the participation of students with severe disabilities in district-wide alternate assessment programs.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Requirements of Federal and California Law

Federal and State laws require that all students with disabilities be included in general statewide and district-wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations, if necessary. Students with severe disabilities who cannot participate in general large-scale assessment programs even with accommodations must receive an alternate assessment. Section 612(a)(17) of IDEA '97 states:

"As appropriate, the State or local educational agency - (i) develops guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in State and district-wide assessment programs; and (ii) develops and, beginning not later than July 1, 2000, conducts those alternate assessments."

There are additional specific requirements to:

- Report the number of children participating in alternate assessments,
- Report the performance of children on alternate assessments after July 1, 2000, if doing so would be statistically sound and not disclose the results of individual children.
- Ensure that IEP teams determine how each student will participate in large-scale assessment, and if not participating, describe how the child will be assessed, and
- Reflect the performance of all students with disabilities in performance goals and indicators that are used to guide State Improvement Plans.

Context of California's Statewide General and Alternate Assessment System

Inclusion in assessment is part of a broader movement to include students with disabilities in standards-based reform seen nationwide. This reform has three key features:

- Development of statewide content and performance standards that specify what students should know and be able to do. (California has adopted content standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and history/social science.)

- Development of statewide assessment and accountability policies and programs that align with the standards. (California implements the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program in grades 2 – 11. The assessment is aligned with the content standards.)
- Decision-making by local districts about the specific curricular and instructional approaches they will use to attain the standards.

States differ in the extent to which their standards emphasize academic versus general life skills. Broadly defined standards include a wide range of student ability levels. California's content and performance standards focus on rigorous academic knowledge and skills, and look to preparation for careers and college. Rigorous academic standards are appropriate for most students, including those with mild or moderate disabilities. However, such standards are less useful for students with severe disabilities who are learning functional, life-skills.

Purposes of Assessment and Rationale for Alternate Assessment

Assessments are done for various reasons. An important distinction is between individual and large-scale assessment. Individual assessments are conducted for clinical diagnosis or evaluation of special education eligibility. Large-scale assessments underlie system accountability at the school, district, or state level. These different purposes strongly influence an assessment's design, administration, and reporting procedures.

In the past, assessments were given to help set individual student goals and objectives, to guide instruction and services, and to evaluate student progress. A team of qualified professionals customized the assessment to fit the unique needs of each child. Results of individualized assessments typically cannot be combined to report on the performance of schools, districts, or the state.

In contrast, states and districts conduct large-scale assessments in general education for system accountability. These large-scale tests are usually conducted in groups under controlled, standardized conditions so that individual students' results are comparable and can be combined. Results are used to report on the overall performance of schools, districts, or the state.

Some students with disabilities need accommodations to take part in large-scale assessments. The purpose of accommodations is to minimize the influence of disabilities that are not relevant to the purpose of testing. According to the 1999 Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, "accommodation" is a general term that can refer to any departure from standard testing content, format or administration procedures. Examples of accommodations are extended time, separate setting, Braille, or large-print.

A small number of students with severe disabilities, whose instructional program is primarily non-academic, cannot meaningfully participate in California's large-scale general assessment even with accommodations. Alternate assessment is best understood as a means of including students with the most severe disabilities in the State's assessment and accountability program. The National Center for Educational Outcomes (Thurlow, Elliott and Ysseldyke, 1998) refers to alternate assessment as the "ultimate accommodation" because it allows for *all* students to be counted in the accountability system.

Historically, students with severe disabilities often have been excluded from statewide assessment. Beginning July 1, 2000, IDEA '97 requires these students to participate in alternate assessment if they can not take part in the general assessment. The rationale for this requirement is the belief that including all students in states' assessment programs will create a more accurate picture of the education system's performance. It will also lead to greater accountability for the educational outcomes of all students.

California Statewide Assessment

State and district-wide assessment programs should include all students with disabilities. The alternate assessment requirement of IDEA '97 applies particularly to California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program because STAR is the state's primary accountability mechanism.

In 1998, the State Board of Education selected the multiple-choice portion of the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition, Form T (Stanford 9) to be administered each spring to all students in grades 2 through 11. The test has been augmented to align with State Board of Education adopted Curriculum Standards. The STAR program mandates extensive reporting of assessment results for students, schools, districts, counties, and the state.

PARTICIPATION IN GENERAL OR ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

State and Federal Law

In general, California law for the STAR program requires participation of all students in grades 2 – 11. However, IEP teams may exempt students with disabilities from participation in statewide assessment. Education Code 60640 (e) states with regard to the STAR program: "Individuals with exceptional needs who have an explicit provision in their individualized education program that exempts them from the testing requirement of subdivision (b) shall be so exempt." Students with more significant disabilities, who cannot participate in the regular assessment even with accommodations, should receive an IEP exemption, and must participate in the state's alternate assessment program.

California law allows parents to exclude their children from statewide assessment. The parent must initiate the request and it must be submitted in writing to school officials. Districts may not solicit parent exemptions.

Determining Eligibility for Participation in Alternate Assessment

An estimated 10-20% of students with disabilities (1-2% of the general student population) can not take part in the STAR Program even with accommodations and must receive an alternate assessment. In general, the curriculum should determine whether a student participates in the general statewide assessment or the alternate assessment.

The IEP team should consider: (1) whether the student participates in an academic or functional curriculum; (2) the types of instructional modifications used with the student; (3) whether the student is working toward a regular high school diploma; (4) the preference of the parent and where applicable, the student; and (5) input from other involved agencies. The decision should not be influenced by the student's social, cultural or economic background, attendance, or by previous record of achievement.

Decisions regarding accommodations and participation in alternate or general statewide assessment must be documented in the IEP. The table below illustrates the relationship between choice of assessment procedure and the student's curriculum. The unshaded areas represent appropriate choices of assessment given a particular curriculum. The distinction between "standard" and "non-standard" accommodations for the STAR program appears below.

Curriculum	Type of Assessment			
	Regular			Alternate
	Accommodations			
	None or Standard		Non-Standard	
General academic curriculum with or without slight instructional accommodations.	(60 – 70% of students with disabilities)			
General academic curriculum with significant instructional accommodations.			(25 – 30% of students with disabilities)	
Functional curriculum.				(10-20% of students with disabilities)

The STAR program allows accommodations that are justified and described in the IEP. The test publisher categorized accommodations in the STAR program as either "standard" or "non-standard." The test publisher believes that standard accommodations are consistent with the conditions and assumptions that governed the development and norming of the test, while non-standard accommodations are less consistent with those conditions and assumptions.

NATURE OF THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

Relationship to Statewide Content Standards

California's "content standards" are defined as "the specific academic knowledge, skills, and abilities that all public schools are expected to teach and all pupils expected to learn in each of the core curriculum areas, at each grade level." The State Board of Education has adopted content standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts, Science, and History/Social Science, focused on preparation for careers and post-secondary study.

While California's rigorous academic standards are appropriate for most students with mild or moderate disabilities, they have little in common with the functional curriculum provided to the 1 – 2% of all students who will likely require an alternate assessment. Instructional programs for students with severe disabilities generally focus on non-academic content areas, for example: communication, socialization, personal management, leisure/recreation, functional academics, pre-vocational work skills, motor skills, domestic skills, and so on. Various professional organizations and researchers have provided descriptions of these common functional areas. (See for example, Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1997; Giangreco, Conginger & Iverson, 1993; Ford et al, 1989; Falvey, 1989; Kokaska & Brolin, 1985; Frey, Burke, Jakworth, Lynch & Sumpter, 1996.)

Given the academic rigor embodied in California's current standards, the state and/or districts may consider developing broader standards. These broader standards could embody both core academic and non-academic content relevant to all students, including those with severe disabilities. Despite the lack of official extended or broadened California content standards, it is necessary to develop and implement an alternate assessment program for these students.

Special education is by design individualized in nature, meaning in part that the IEP team determines instructional goals and approaches that meet the unique needs of the student. Developing content standards for students in special education represents a substantial shift in thinking about the education of students with disabilities. The individualized assessments that are conducted within special education are not well-suited for large-scale assessment and accountability. For an alternate assessment to serve large-scale assessment purposes, comparable results must be obtained and aggregated to produce an overall estimate of performance. A necessary condition of comparability is that the assessment measure a common content.

Despite the individualized nature of special education, certain content areas may be thought of as constituting a common curriculum. Some of the most common areas include:

- Communication
- Self-Care, Independent Living
- Motor Skills, Mobility
- Functional Academics
- Vocational Skills
- Social/Emotional
- Recreation, Leisure

Appendix C provides definitions and examples of the goals found within each of the above seven areas.

Most IEP goals for students with severe disabilities fall within one or more of these seven areas. Of course, IEP teams are responsible for specifying an individualized education program that reflects a student's unique educational needs. They may thus focus on goals that do not fall within these particular areas. However, the content areas listed above provide a minimal basis for comparable measurement and aggregation of results.

Using the Completed IEP as the Basis for Alternate Assessment

Completed by a team that knows the student's strengths and needs, the IEP contains information regarding progress and performance on specific, measurable goals and objectives. Since completed IEPs contain information regarding the student's mastery of specific goals, California's alternate assessment involves an examination of completed IEPs. This examination entails sorting each student's IEP goals into one of the areas listed above, or into an "other" category. Each goal is then rated according to the following rubric:

Level of Progress/Mastery (with respect to the specific goal)	1 Beginning	2 Transitional	3 Intermediate	4 Competent
	No progress.	Partial progress (met 1-49% of the criteria).	Substantial progress (met 50-99% of the criteria).	Goal met or exceeded.

Appendix B displays a form that can be used to score mastery achieved on IEP goals. The information recorded on the form can be aggregated and reported at the state, district and school levels (subject to limitations imposed by confidentiality requirements).

Scoring and Reliability Checking

Scoring should be conducted by a credentialed employee of the district who knows the student, typically the teacher. Raters should discuss and reach consensus on uniform application of mastery standards in order to assure fairness and reliability of scores.

To assure fairness and reliability, a 20% random sample of the total number of students participating in the alternate assessment should be scored a second time by another credentialed employee of the district who knows the student and who has not participated in the first scoring the student's IEP. Discrepancies in scoring suggest that different raters are applying different mastery standards. Districts should resolve discrepancies through additional training of raters to a common mastery standard.

Multiple Measures at the Local Level

In addition to participating in the state's IEP-based alternate assessment, local education agencies may also wish to use other measures to create a more comprehensive picture of students' educational experiences and outcomes. Depending on the availability of resources and feasibility, one or more of the following options can be considered:

1. Evaluate performance and independence with respect to specific benchmarks and indicators developed within each content area.
2. Evaluate performance and independence using a commercially available assessment.
3. Document the presence of natural peer supports.
4. Document the availability and use of assistive technology.
5. Document progress using a portfolio assessment.
6. Survey parent satisfaction with student outcomes and the instructional program.
7. Survey teacher satisfaction with student outcomes and the instructional program.
8. Document the amount of instructional time spent in each of the functional areas.

2000 TIMELINE FOR REPORTING AND ASSESSING

The law requires the Alternate Assessment system to start by July 1, 2000. In order to align with mandated STAR reporting deadlines, all eligible students whose IEPs are completed between July 1, 2000 and May 31, 2001 must be submitted by June 15, 2001. Districts may submit assessment results throughout the year as they occur, submit them in batches throughout the year, or submit them all at once, provided that all alternate assessments are received by no later than June 15, 2001.

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Appendix A
California Alternate Assessment Workgroup Participants

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Appendix B

Alternate Assessment Survey (Revised 4/17/00)

Purpose. The California Department of Education uses information collected through the Alternate Assessment Survey to produce federal reports required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Amendments of 1997, Public Law 105-17, Section 612(a)17. Results for individuals are confidential and subject to state and federal privacy requirements. Summary data are made available to educational institutions and the general public.

Procedure. Responsibility for filling out the Alternate Assessment Survey for a student should be delegated to a credentialed school employee who is a member of the student's IEP team, for example, a teacher. The student's most recent final annual evaluation is the basis of the survey. The IEP team should review and approve the ratings. Copies of the survey should be given to the student's parent or guardian and should be placed into the student's school folder.

For more information, see the Alternate Assessment Guidelines. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/altassmt.pdf>

IDENTIFICATION

All information in this box is required. Please verify that all fields are filled in and correct.

Enter the official county-district-school (CDS) code and SELPA code issued to the site where the student is services. Contact your site administrator, if necessary. These codes are required for processing the alternate ass

CDS Code _____ - _____ - _____

SELPA Code _____

Student ID (CASEMIS Code) _____

Date when the IEP team reviewed and approved the completed Alternate Assessment Survey

Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

Primary Disability Category Code _____

First Name or Initial _____ Last Name or Initial _____

Date of Birth Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

Gender (circle one) M F

This form accommodates up to 15 goals. If you need more space, submit another form and check here []. Provide the following information for each goal: Key words; content area; mastery; and reason goal not met (if mastery is less than 49 %).

Goal Key Words	Content Area* (circle one)	Mastery/Progress** (circle one)	Reason Goal Not Me one)
1.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
2.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
3.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
4.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
5.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
6.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
7.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
8.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
9.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
10.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
11.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
12.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
13.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
14.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
15.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5

Alternate Assessment Survey Directions

County/District/School and SELPA Codes Enter the official county-district-school (CDS) code and SELPA code that the California Department of Education issued to the site where the student is receiving services. Contact your site administrator, if necessary.

Student Identification. Enter the 16-digit student identifier used for the state's CASEMIS data system.

Date. Enter the date when the IEP team reviewed and approved the completed Alternate Assessment Survey. (MM-DD-YY)

Primary Disability Category. Write down the code for the student's primary disability.

010 Mental Retardation	060 Emotional Disturbance	110 Multiple Disabilities
020 Hard of Hearing	070 Orthopedic Impairment	120 Autism
030 Deaf	080 Other Health Impairment	130 Traumatic Brain Injury
040 Speech or Language Impairment	090 Specific Learning Disability	
050 Visual Impairment	100 Deaf-Blindness	

Name or Initials: Write down the student's first and last name or initials.

Date of Birth: Write down the student's date of birth (MM-DD-YY)

Gender: Select the student's gender.

If the student has more than fifteen goals fill out a second (or third, etc.) form and check the "additional form" box.

Goal Key Words. Write one or two key words that describe the IEP goal to be rated. For Example: picture identification, throwing a ball, eye gaze, etc.

***Content Area.** Circle one number corresponding to the content area that best describes the instructional goal. If none of the listed area reasonably describes the goal, circle "8" (other).

1. Communication	4. Vocational	7. Recreation, Leisure
2. Self Care, Independent Living	5. Mobility, Motor skills	8. Other
3. Functional Academics	6. Social, Emotional	

****Mastery/Progress Rating.** Circle one number that best corresponds to the degree of mastery exhibited by the student towards the goal.

1. Beginning: No progress.	3. Intermediate: Substantial progress (50-99% of goal met)
2. Transitional: Partial progress (1-49% of goal met)	4. Competent: Goal met or exceeded

*****Reason for not Meeting Goal.** If the student had a mastery/progress rating of 1 or 2, circle the one number that best corresponds to the reason for not meeting the goal.

1. More time needed	4. Need to review or revise goal
2. Excessive absences or tardies	5. Other
3. Assignments not completed	

Appendix C: Definitions and Examples of Content Areas

1. Communication: Skills relating to the ability to comprehend and express information in a variety of ways. The development of receptive and expressive language skills, including nonverbal and gestured communication, the use of augmented communication systems and the ability to comprehend and express emotions. Examples:

• Receptive language	• Attending
• Expressive language	• Oral Motor Skills (related to speech development)
• Facial expression	• Use of assistive technology

2. Self-Care/Independent Living: Skills relating to toileting, eating, dressing, hygiene and grooming. Includes skills related to functioning within a home, maintenance of one's health, and purchasing or obtaining goods and services. Examples:

• Clothing care	• Food preparation
• Feeding	• Oral Motor Skills (relating to eating skills)
• Following rules	• Housekeeping skills

3. Motor Skills, Mobility: Skills relating to gross motor development and ambulation, including strength, balance and coordination. Skills related to physical activities. Skills related to increased independence and physical access to both the school campus and the community. Examples:

• Street safety	• Use of playground equipment
• Wheelchair use	• Recreational object control
• Mobility skills	• Walking

4. Functional Academics: Abilities and skills related to academics that also have direct application in one's life. The acquisition of academic skills that are functional in terms of independent living. The development of prerequisite skills, including fine motor development, cognitive skills and pre-operational activities. Examples:

• Attending	• Math
• Computer usage	• Concept development
• General knowledge	• Reading/symbol identification

5. Vocational: Abilities related to procuring or holding a job in the community and the development of specific work skills. May include task completion, self-management and job-related interactions with peers and adults.

• Assembly tasks	• Following directions
• Left/Right orientation	• Independent work skills
• Time management	• Sorting Tasks

6. Social, Emotional: Skills related to regulating behavior, social exchanges, coping with demands and controlling impulses. May include the development of social skills, responding to situational cues and making choices. For young children, includes the development of play skills.

• Eye contact	• Using appropriate behavior in school/community
• Anger control	• Sharing and cooperating
• Compliance	• Manners

7. Recreation, Leisure: Skills related to pursuing hobbies, interests, sports activities, or other appropriate activities undertaken in free time. May include activities done alone or with others. Examples:

• Games, puzzles	• Social gatherings
• Arts, crafts	• Hobbies, e.g., collecting things
• Music, rhythm	• Spectator sports, participation in team or individual sports

Note: Some skills can fall under one or more categories, depending on the specific nature of the task and the way the goal is written. For example, attending behavior may fit within any area depending on the situation. If the student is attending to the spoken word or a public school lecture, it would likely be considered a communication task. If the student is attending to a vocational task, it would be listed under the pre-vocational/vocational area.